## IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Previously presented) An ester F of formula I

(EO) 
$$n_3$$
 (PO)  $m_3$  (EO)  $m_1$  (EO)  $m_1$  (EO)  $m_2$  (EO)  $m_2$ 

Ι

wherein EO is O-CH2-CH2-,

PO is independently at each instance O-CH2-CH(CH3)- or O-CH(CH3)-CH2-,

n1, n2, and n3 are independently 4, 5, or 6, n1 + n2 + n3 is 14, 15, or 16,

 $\mbox{m1, m2, and m3 are independently 1, 2, or 3,}$ 

m1 + m2 + m3 is 4, 5, or 6, and

R1, R2, and R3 are independently H or CH3.

- 2. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein n1 + n2 + n3 is 15.
- 3. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein n1 = n2 = n3 = 5.
- 4. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein m1 + m2 + m3 is 5.
- 5. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein m1 = m2 = 2 and m3 = 1.

6. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein R1, R2, and R3 are identical.

7. (Currently amended) A process for preparing an ester F of claim 1 from an alkoxylated trimethylolpropane of formula II

H 
$$_{(EO) n_3}$$
  $_{(PO) m_3}$   $_{(EO) n_2}$   $_{(EO) n_2}$   $_{(EO) n_2}$   $_{(EO) n_2}$ 

ΙI

wherein EO, PO, n1, n2, n3, m1, m2, and m3 are each as defined in claim 1,

and (meth)acrylic acid, comprising the steps of

- a) reacting the alkoxylated trimethylolpropane II with (meth)acrylic acid in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C, at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and optionally a waterazeotroping solvent E to form the ester F,
- b) optionally removing from the reaction mixture some or all of the water formed in a), during and/or after a),
- f) optionally neutralizing the reaction mixture,
- h) when a solvent E is used, optionally removing the solvent E by distillation, and/or
- i) stripping the reaction mixture with a gas which is inert under the reaction conditions,

wherein a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxylated trimethylolpropane in step (a) is at least 3.15:1.

8. (Currently amended) The process of claim 7 wherein

a molar excess of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxylated trimethylolpropane is at least 3.15:1, and

the optionally neutralized (meth)acrylic acid present in the reaction mixture after the last process step substantially remains in the reaction mixture.

- 9. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the (meth)acrylic acid is not more than 75% by weight removed from the reaction mixture obtained after the last step, which reaction mixture contains the ester F.
- 10. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a DIN EN 3682 acid number of at least 25 mg of KOH/g.
- 11. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the reaction mixture obtained after the last process step, which contains the ester F, has a (meth) acrylic acid content of at least 0.5% by weight.
- 12. (Previously presented) The process of claim 7 wherein the molar ratio of (meth)acrylic acid to alkoxylated trimethylolpropane in step a) is at least 15:1.

- 13. (Previously presented) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel comprising the steps of
- k) polymerizing an ester F of claim 1 with (meth)acrylic acid, optionally with an additional monoethylenically unsaturated compound N, and optionally at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally at least one grafting base L,
- $\label{eq:constraint} 1) \quad \text{optionally postcrosslinking the reaction} \\ \\ \text{mixture obtained from } k) \, ,$
- $$\mbox{m})$$  drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or 1), and
- n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l), or m).

- 14. (Previously presented) A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel comprising steps a) to i) of claim 7 and additionally
- k) polymerizing the reaction mixture from one of steps a) to i) of claim 7, if performed, optionally with an additional monoethylenically unsaturated compound N and optionally at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M, in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and optionally at least one grafting base L,
- $\label{eq:constraint} \mbox{1)} \quad \mbox{optionally postcrosslinking the reaction} \\ \mbox{mixture obtained from $k$),}$
- m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or 1), and
- n) optionally grinding and/or sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), 1), or m).
- 15. (Previously presented) A polymer prepared according to the process of claim 13.
- 16. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel containing at least one hydrophilic monomer M in polymerized form crosslinked with an ester F of claim 1.
  - 17. (Cancelled)
  - 18. (Cancelled)

19. (Previously presented) A composition comprising

from 0.1% to 40% by weight of at least one ester F of claim 1,

0.5-99.9% by weight of at least one hydrophilic monomer M,

0-10% by weight of at least one esterification catalyst C,

0-5% by weight of at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and

0-10% by weight of a solvent E,

with the proviso that the sum total is always 100% by weight.

20. (Previously presented) The composition of claim 19 further comprising

a diluent G.

21. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel prepared from a composition of claim 19, and optionally postcrosslinked.

## 22. (Cancelled)

- 23. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel having a saponification index of less than 10.
- 24. (Previously presented) A crosslinked hydrogel prepared according to claim 13 having a saponification index of less than 10.

- 25. (Previously presented) The ester F of claim 1 wherein R1, R2, and R3 are H.
- 26. (Previously presented) A polymer prepared according to the process of claim 14.
- 27. (Previously presented) An article comprising a polymer prepared according to the method of claim 13.
- 28. (Previously presented) The article of claim 27 selected from the group consisting of a hygiene article, a packaging material, and a nonwoven.
- 29. (Previously presented) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 23 having a saponification index of less than 8.
- 30. (Previously presented) The crosslinked hydrogel of claim 24 having a saponification index of less than 9.